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HISTORICAL DIFFERENCES IN RELATIONSHIP FUNCTIONING

Historical Differences in Relationship Functioning: Findings from three National Population-Based Samples in Europe

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Abstract

Individual development and relationships are embedded in a socio-historical context. In the present study, we examined how relationship functioning of heterosexual couples differs across historical time in three population-based samples. We used data from the Swiss Social Stratification, Cohesion and Conflict in Contemporary Families Study (COUPLES: waves 1998 vs. 2011), the Swiss Household Panel (SHP: waves 2000 vs. 2016), and the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS: 1996-97 vs. 2008-09), each including a different measure of relationship functioning (COUPLES: conflict, SHP: practical and emotional support, and, BHPS: relationship satisfaction). We also examined the role of age and other correlates. Using propensity score matching methods, we selected couples in both waves matched by age, relationship duration, and region within each study (COUPLES: 174 couples per wave, mean age = 30 in men and 27 in women; SHP: 1,071 couples per wave, mean age = 47 in men and 44 in women; and, BHPS: 316 couples per wave, mean age = 36 in men and 33 in women). Our results revealed that while women and men in the later wave reported more frequent conflict, women in the later wave reported more emotional and practical support from their partner, resulting in a smaller gender gap over historical time, and men in the later wave reported higher relationship satisfaction. Taken together, this pattern of historical differences is largely consistent with what would be expected based on increased egalitarianism. We discuss the role of societal change in shaping romantic relationships.

Keywords: historical differences; relationship; conflict; support; relationship satisfaction

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Historical Differences in Relationship Functioning: Findings from three National Population-Based Samples in Europe

Individual development is embedded in multiple social systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), including the social and historical context. Previous research has documented how individual well-being is shaped by historical time (e.g., Hülür, Ram, & Gerstorf, 2015; Sutin et al., 2013; Twenge, Sherman, & Lyubomirsky, 2016; for overview, see Hülür, 2017). For most adults, the most immediate social context in which individual development takes place is the couple relationship, which is itself set in a social and historical context. Drawing from lifespan psychological and life course sociological theories emphasizing the role of the historical context for development (e.g., Baltes, Cornelius, & Nesselroade, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Elder, 1974; Schaie, 1965), we examine whether and how perceptions of relationship functioning have changed over historical time. To do so, we use data from three different population-based studies in Europe that involve measures of different aspects of relationship functioning (conflict, available emotional and practical support from one's partner, and relationship satisfaction).

Multiple Aspects of Relationship Functioning

Research on adjustment in dyadic couple relationships has identified multiple aspects of relationship functioning. One of the most studied aspects of relationship functioning is relationship satisfaction, i.e., a cognitive-evaluative judgment of people's relationships (Fincham & Beach, 2006; Gerlach, Driebe, & Reinhard, 2018). Previous research has well documented that the beginning of a relationship is characterized by perceptions of high relationship quality, which tends to level off over the course of time (Lavner & Bradbury, 2010).

Other aspects of relationship functioning refer to couple's behaviors in their everyday lives. For example, it is well documented that support provision relates to better relationship outcomes, such as relationship satisfaction (Lawrence et al., 2008). Researchers usually

differentiate between two kinds of social support: emotional support (such as caring, expressing concern, intimacy) and practical support, that is, providing assistance (Helgeson, 1993; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). According to the support gap hypothesis, women receive less support than men in heterosexual couple relationships (Xu & Burleson, 2001). The support gap hypothesis is well supported by analyses of self-report data (Schwarzer & Gutierrez-Dona, 2005; Verhofstadt, Buysse, & Ickes, 2007), although studies relying on observational methods have produced mixed findings (Verhofstadt et al., 2007). Furthermore, the support gap has typically been found for emotional support, while gender differences are less clear in other types of received support (for overview see Xu & Burleson, 2001). Gender differences may also be age-dependent: Schwarzer and Gutierrez-Dona (2005) reported that received spousal support was lower in middle-aged women as compared with young women, whereas the opposite pattern was found for middle-aged vs. younger men (see also Knoll & Schwarzer, 2002).

Another commonly studied aspect of dyadic couple relationships is conflict, i.e., opposition and disagreement between partners. Associations between conflict and relationship satisfaction are complex and depend on a number of different factors. For example, Cramer (2002) reported that conflict frequency itself was unrelated to relationship satisfaction, while negative conflict handling, negative conflict outcome, and unresolved conflicts were negatively related to relationship satisfaction. Consequences of conflict for relationship outcomes have also been found to vary depending on attachment style (Hicks & Diamond, 2011) and topic of conflict (Sanford, 2003).

Historical Differences in Relationship Functioning

Over the last century, several historical changes have taken place that may impact how couples experience their relationships. We outline three specific mechanisms that could have led to historical differences in relationship satisfaction, support provision, and conflict frequency. The first potential mechanism is related to processes of selection. There have been

shifts toward an "individualization of the life course", with individual choices replacing socially accepted norms regarding work, relationship, and family domains (Hofmeister, 2013). In the domain of family and relationships, attitudes and values have been shifting in the direction of more acceptance and tolerance of individual choices, such as divorce or remaining single (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Furthermore, being without a partner is associated with less negative psychosocial outcomes in later-born individuals (van Tilburg, Aartsen, & van der Pas, 2015; van Tilburg & Suanet, in press). As a result, individuals may feel less pressure to commit to a relationship or marriage (i.e., selection into a relationship) and may be readier to dissolve relationships (i.e., selection out of a relationship) that are characterized by low levels of satisfaction and supportiveness and high levels of conflict.

A second mechanism is related to values and expectations individuals bring into their relationships in different historical times. According to the suffocation model of relationships, the purpose of marriage shifted from fulfilling intimacy needs to fulfilling more self-expressive needs over the last century (Finkel, Cheung, Emery, Carswell, & Larson, 2015; Finkel, Hui, Carswell, & Larson, 2014; see also Cherlin, 2004). Based on this model, Finkel and colleagues (2014, 2015) argue that average marriages have become less satisfying over historical time, because it has become increasingly difficult to meet these growing needs and expectations. Based on this model, one may also expect that unfulfilled needs may lead to increased conflicts as well as perceiving support available from the partner as less adequate.

A third mechanism is related to growing egalitarianism. Levels of educational attainment substantially increased over the 20th century (e.g., Schaie, Willis, & Pennak, 2005), with especially steep increases in educational attainment for women (e.g., DiPrete & Buchmann, 2006). This was accompanied by an increase in women's employment and participation in the workforce (Fullerton, 1999; Major & Germano, 2006) and a decline in the prevalence of single breadwinner households (Lesthaeghe, 2007). Also, the division of housework shifted toward a more egalitarian share (Bartley, Blanton, & Gilliard, 2005;

Coltrane, 2000). As a result of increasing egalitarianism, it may be expected that women and men's experiences in their relationships are becoming more similar to one another over historical time. For example, it may be expected that the support gap (Xu & Burleson, 2001) is becoming smaller.

Previous research has shown that individuals in 1997 reported more conflict with their spouse than individuals in 1981 (Rogers & Amato, 2000). In contrast, marital happiness remained relatively stable during the same time period (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; Rogers & Amato, 2000). Rogers and Amato (2000) argued that one possible reason for more conflict in the late 1990s is the increase in women's employment, which, combined with women's still high share of household work, could lead to an increased work-life conflict (e.g., Hammer, Cullen, Neal, Sinclair, & Shafiro, 2005; Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006).

The Present Study

In the present study, we examine how relationship functioning has changed over the recent decades and how individual and partner characteristics predict differences between couples. Specifically, we study historical differences in several indicators of relationship functioning in three national population samples in Europe, the COUPLES (Social Stratification, Cohesion and Conflict in Contemporary Families) Study in Switzerland (Widmer, Kellerhals, & Levy, 2004), the Swiss Household Panel (SHP: Voorpostel et al., 2016), and the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS: Taylor et al., 2010). The studies focused on different aspects of relationship functioning, including conflict frequency (COUPLES), available emotional and practical support from one's partner (SHP), and relationship satisfaction (BHPS). We used dyadic data from heterosexual couples in late 1990s/early 2000s vs. early/mid 2010s. Using a cross-sectional time-lag analytic approach (Schaie, 1965), the respective years were selected with the goal of keeping the temporal distance between the cohorts as long as possible. We equated the couples in different years with respect to age, relationship duration, and region with propensity score matching methods

(Coffman, 2011; Thoemmes & Kim, 2011). This allowed us to minimize the effects of confounding variables because sampling schemes in different waves of the same longitudinal study differed according to these variables.

We first examined the effects of historical time on conflict frequency, available practical and emotional support, and relationship satisfaction. The outlined mechanisms in the introduction related to (a) selection, (b) goals and expectations, and (c) egalitarianism make different predictions regarding expected historical differences. According to the selection mechanism, it can be expected that all outcome variables are improved across historical time: Couples who experience high levels of conflict and low levels of support and relationship satisfaction may be more likely to dissolve their relationship in the later vs. the earlier time period. According to the mechanism related to goals and expectations, individuals' increasing pursuit of self-actualization goals may have adverse effects on the relationship: The failure to meet these goals may result in conflict, lower levels of perceived (emotional) support and lower levels of relationship satisfaction. According to the mechanism of egalitarianism, the increased participation of women in the workforce may result in work-family conflicts. At the same time, the experiences of women and men should become more similar and differences between women and men should become smaller.

Second, with regard to the role of age, we expected that relationship conflict would decline with age, because earlier research has shown that people become more agreeable with age (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008). Based on previous research, we expected that available emotional and practical support would decline with age in women and remain stable in men. Furthermore, we expected relationship satisfaction to decline with age, because age is usually related to relationship duration and relationship satisfaction is higher in earlier stages of the relationship and tends to decline later on (Lavner & Bradbury, 2010).

In addition, we explored several individual, partner, and couple characteristics as predictors of relationship functioning (education: Guo & Huang, 2005, employment: Amato et

al., 2003, household work: Ruppanner, Brandén, & Turunen, 2018, children: Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003, marital status: Brown, Manning, & Payne, 2017). According to the interpretation of work-family conflicts as a potential source behind relationship conflict, employment, having children, and household work should be associated with higher levels of conflict. According to the mechanism of selection, being married indicates a higher commitment to the relationship and should be associated with more positive relationship outcomes. Higher levels of education may indicate the availability of resources and partners with higher levels of education may be in a better position to provide (practical) support.

Method

Detailed information about participants, variables, and procedures is provided in previous publications (COUPLES: Widmer et al., 2004; SHP: Voorpostel et al., 2016; BHPS: Taylor et al., 2010). Select details relevant to the present study are given below.

Participants and Procedure

COUPLES. COUPLES is a longitudinal study that started in 1998 with a nationally representative stratified sample of heterosexual couples in Switzerland. Data collection took place in 1998, 2004, and 2011 and new couples joined the study in 2011. In our analyses, we used data from all couples who participated at the initial 1998 assessment and couples in the refresher sample who joined the study in 2011 and provided valid data on study variables. The 1998 assessment included 1,522 couples, with an average relationship duration of 20 years (*SD* = 12, range: 1-49). Women were on average 44 years old (*SD* = 12, range: 21-75) and men were on average 47 years old (*SD* = 12, range: 22-84). The 2011 refresher sample included 176 couples, with an average relationship duration of 6 years (*SD* = 4, range: 0-28). Women were on average 27 years old (*SD* = 3, range: 20-48) and men were on average 30 years old (*SD* = 5, range: 21-58). It is important to note that the 1998 wave included young, middle-aged and older couples, whereas the 2011 refresher sample only included young and

middle-aged couples. This potential confound was addressed using propensity score matching procedures.

SHP. The SHP is an ongoing longitudinal study that started in 1999 with a nationally representative stratified sample of households in Switzerland. Data collection takes place annually. In our analyses, we used data from all heterosexual couples who participated at the 2000 or 2016 waves and provided valid data on background variables and relevant constructs. If data from a couple were available at both waves, or if an individual participated in both waves as part of a different couple, we only included data from the earlier assessment. We did not use data from the initial 1999 wave because one of the variables included in our analyses (number of hours spent with household work) was assessed differently in 1999. The 2000 assessment included 1,089 couples, with an average relationship duration of 19 years (*SD* = 13, range: 0-57). Women were on average 44 years old (*SD* = 13, range: 19-82) and men were on average 46 years old (*SD* = 13, range: 22-89). The 2016 assessment included 1,300 couples, with an average relationship duration of 22 years (*SD* = 15, range: 0-72). Women were on average 48 years old (*SD* = 14, range: 19-91) and men were on average 51 years old (*SD* = 14, range: 19-94).

BHPS. The BHPS is a longitudinal study that started in 1991 with a nationally representative sample of households in Great Britain. Data were collected annually. We analyzed data from all heterosexual couples who participated at wave 6 (conducted in 1996/1997) or wave 18 (2008/2009) and provided valid data on background variables and relevant constructs. Because households in Northern Ireland were included in wave 18 only, we did not use data from these households. If data from a couple were available at both waves, or if an individual participated in both waves as part of a different couple, we only included data from the earlier assessment. We did not use data from the waves 1-5 because relationship satisfaction was first assessed at wave 6. The 1996/1997 assessment included 2,257 couples, with an average relationship duration of 19 years (*SD* = 15, range: 0-61). Men were on average 47 years old

(*SD* = 15, range: 17-91) and women were on average 44 years old (*SD* = 15, range: 17-90). The 2008/2009 assessment included 464 couples, with an average relationship duration of 6 years (*SD* = 7, range: 0-54). Men were on average 37 years old (*SD* = 14, range: 18-87) and women were on average 34 years old (*SD* = 13, range: 17-83).

Measures

Socio-demographic variables. *Age* was reported separately by both partners. In the COUPLES study, *relationship duration* was indicated by the number of years the couple was living together. In the SHP, the year the relationship began was reported separately by each partner. In the BHPS, relationship duration was indicated by the years the couple was living together, or for couples who were already married at the beginning of the study, relationship duration was the duration of their marriage. In the SHP and BHPS, couples were excluded in case their reports on relationship duration differed by more than one year. In case of inconsistencies of one year, the earlier report was selected[1]. *Marital status* was a binary variable (1 = married; 0 = cohabiting). In the SHP and BHPS, responses were provided separately by both partners. Couples with inconsistent responses (one partner reporting being married, the other not) were excluded from further analyses. The *presence of children in the household* was indicated by a binary variable (1 = yes; 0 = no). In the COUPLES study, participants indicated their highest level of *education* on a six-point scale (1 = obligatory education, 2 = upper secondary school without university entrance qualification, 3 = apprenticeship or vocational school, 4 = university entrance qualification or teacher's college, 5 = technical college, 6 = university education). In the SHP, an individual's highest level of education was indicated by the number of years spent in formal schooling. In the BHPS participant's education was indicated by the CASMIN classification of education, a nine-point-scale, which differentiates between general and vocational education in three overarching levels (primary, secondary, and tertiary education, Brauns, Scherer, & Steinmann, 2003). *Work status* was indicated by a binary variable (1 = working, 0 = not

working). In the COUPLES and SHP studies, the interviews were conducted in the three most common national languages of Switzerland: German, French, or Italian. The language *region* of a couple was coded as the interview language if both partners were interviewed in the same language. If not, the couple's language was coded as the language most common in the region of Switzerland that the couple was residing in. We created two dummy-coded variables indicating the language region. In the BHPS, the region (England, Wales, or Scotland) was indicated by two dummy-coded variables. In the COUPLES study, participants rated their share in six different household tasks on a five-point scale (1 = less than one quarter, 2 = one quarter, 3 = half, 4 = three quarters, 5 = practically everything). The household tasks included (a) grocery shopping and cooking, (b) cleaning, (c) washing and ironing, (d) taxes and paperwork, and (e) repairs and car maintenance. The household tasks a to c were averaged as they showed substantial intercorrelations (Cronbach's alpha: .68 for women and .62 for men, respectively). In the SHP, participants indicated the number of weekly hours they spent with housework and rated their satisfaction with the way that housework is shared on an eleven-point scale from 0 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied). In BHPS, participants indicated the number of weekly hours spent with housework.

Relationship functioning. Different aspects of relationship functioning were assessed in the three studies. In the COUPLES study, participants indicated the *frequency of conflict* on a seven-point scale (0 = almost never, 1 = less than once a month, 2 = once a month, 3 = two to three times a month, 4 = once a week, 5 = two to three times a week, 6 = almost daily). In the SHP, participants indicated *available practical and emotional support from their partner* on an eleven-point scale with the questions "If necessary, in your opinion, to what extent can your partner provide you with practical help (this means concrete help or useful advice), if 0 means not at all and 10 a great deal?", and "To what extent can your partner be available in case of need and show understanding, by talking with you for example, if 0 means not at all and 10 a great deal?", respectively. In the BHPS, *relationship satisfaction* was measured on a

seven-point scale from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 7 (completely satisfied) by a single question: "How dissatisfied or satisfied are you with your husband/wife/partner?"

Data Analysis

Due to different age ranges in refresher samples and sample aging in longitudinal design, couples in earlier vs. later waves differed in age. Study participants' new partners and spouses joined the study in later waves, potentially leading to differences in relationship duration. Furthermore, there were differences between waves in the sampling of different geographical regions. Therefore, we used propensity score matching methods (Coffman, 2011; Thoemmes, 2011) to equate couples in earlier vs. later waves with regard to age of both partners, relationship duration, and (language) region in order to minimize the effects of these potential confounding variables. We used one-to-one matching methods to identify for each couple in the measurement wave with the smaller sample size a match from the wave with the larger sample size that was as similar as possible with respect to relevant variables. First, we ran a logistic regression with year of measurement (earlier vs. later wave) as the outcome variable and relationship duration, region, and two age variables (for women and men) as predictors. Second, we saved the propensity score from this regression and logit-transformed it to achieve a better distribution. Third, we set the maximum allowable distance between matched couples (= caliper) to $c = 0.20$ *SD* of the logit score as recommended in the literature (Austin, 2011). If historical differences in background variables were still reliably different from 0 at $p < .05$, we applied a stricter criterion by reducing the caliper by steps of 0.01 *SD* until historical differences were no longer different from 0 at $p < .05$.

Historical differences in relationship functioning were evaluated using the matched data sets with the dyad as unit of analysis. The alpha criterion was set to $p < .05$. Historical differences were assessed with two-intercept models (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013; Campbell & Kashy, 2002) that account for dependencies in the data (Models 1). Specifically, the models were defined as:

$$outcome_{cw} = b_{0w} + b_{1w}\,(\text{historical period}) + e_{cw}, \quad (1)$$

$$outcome_{cm} = b_{0m} + b_{1m}\,(\text{historical period}) + e_{cm}, \quad (2)$$

where $outcome_c$, the value of the outcome variable for couple c (w = women; m = men) is a function of an intercept coefficient for women, b_{0w} and, men, b_{0m}, indicating the average value of the outcome variable for women and men in the reference category, i.e., in the earlier measurement wave, b_{1w} and b_{1m}, indicating the extent of historical differences in women and men, respectively, and, e_{cw} and e_{cm}, residual variances for women and men, which are assumed to be correlated. Because these analyses were performed after propensity score matching, the effects of historical time were net of the matching variables (relationship duration, age, geographic region). In Models 2, we examined linear and quadratic effects of age (centered at the sample mean) on relationship functioning. In order to reduce the number of decimal points to be reported, age was divided by 10 so that the respective parameters indicate the effects of one decade of age. We only examined effects of individual age and not of partner age, because individual age and partner age were very highly correlated. In Models 3, we examined the effects of other variables (centered at sample means) that could potentially explain historical differences. Models were estimated with SAS Proc Mixed (Littell, Miliken, Stoup, Wolfinger, & Schabenberger, 2006). Historical differences in the similarity of partners' reports were examined as the absolute difference between partners' reports (see Schade, Hülür, Infurna, Hoppmann, & Gerstorf, 2016), indicating the gap between the partners' perceptions of relationship functioning.

Results

COUPLES

Propensity score matching. For 174 out of the 176 couples in 2011, we were able to find a matching couple from the 1998 wave with a caliper of $c = 0.13$ *SD*. Compared with the 174 matched couples, the two unmatched couples in 2011 were younger (both men were 23 years old and both women were 21 years old) and had a shorter relationship duration (the couples

had a relationship duration of 3 and 4 years, respectively). Descriptive statistics are given in Tables 1 and 2.

Historical differences in conflict frequency. Results of the multilevel models are shown in Table 3. Both women (b_w = 0.42; *SE* = 0.17; p = .014) and men (b_m = 0.32; *SE* = 0.16; p = .044) in 2011 reported higher conflict frequency (see Model 1). In Model 2, higher age was related to less frequent reports of conflict by women (b_w = −0.85 per decade of age; *SE* = 0.31; p = .007). The effects of historical period and age on conflict frequency are illustrated in Figure 1. In Model 3, women who worked (b_w = 0.46; *SE* = 0.20; p = .021) and women who had children living in the same household (b_w = 0.44; *SE* = 0.22; p = .043) reported more conflict. Women whose partners worked reported less frequent conflict (b_w = −1.16; *SE* = 0.57; p = .045). Furthermore, men with higher levels of education reported more conflict (b_m = 0.13; *SE* = 0.07; p = .039).

Follow-up analyses showed that the effect of marital status on men's reports of conflict varied by historical time: In 1998, married men reported less conflict than cohabiting men (b_m = −0.72; *SE* = 0.29; p = .014). This effect did not exist in 2011 (interaction historical time and marital status: b_m = 0.90; *SE* = 0.39; p = .022).

SHP

Propensity score matching. For 1,071 out of the 1,089 couples in 2000, we were able to find a matching couple from the 2016 wave with a caliper of c = 0.17 *SD*. Compared with the matched couples, the 18 unmatched couples were younger (average age of men was 32 years and average age of women were 30 years) and had a shorter relationship duration (on average 8 years). Descriptive statistics for socio-demographics are given in Table 1. Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for relationship functioning and division of household work variables.

Historical differences in emotional support. Results of the multilevel model are given in Table 4. Women reported higher levels of emotional support in 2016 (Model 1: b_w = 0.21; *SE* = 0.07; p = .006). No difference was found in men (b_m = 0.02; *SE* = 0.05; p = .664). In Model

2, higher age was associated with less emotional support in women (b_w = −0.13 per decade of age; SE = 0.03; p < .001). The effects of historical time and age on emotional support are illustrated in Figure 2 (Panel A). In Model 3, having children living in the same household was related to lower emotional support in men (b_m = −0.19; SE = 0.06; p = .003) and women who worked reported higher levels of emotional support (b_w = 0.19; SE = 0.08; p = .029). Own and partner satisfaction with household work were both independently related to emotional support both in women (own satisfaction: b_w = 0.33; SE = 0.02; p < .001; partner satisfaction: b_w = 0.09; SE = 0.02; p < .001) and men (own satisfaction: b_m = 0.23; SE = 0.02; p < .001; partner satisfaction: b_m = 0.07; SE = 0.01; p < .001). The average absolute difference between partners' reports of emotional support was lower in 2016 (2000: M = 1.38; SD = 1.49; 2016: M = 1.13; SD = 1.36; F[1,2140] = 16.34; p < .001), indicating a smaller gap (see Table 2).

Follow-up analyses indicated that the effect of age on men's reports of emotional support was moderated by historical time. In 2000, a higher age was related to lower emotional support in men (b_m = −0.10; SE = 0.04; p = .005). This effect did not exist in 2016 (interaction effect of historical time and age: b_m = 0.12; SE = 0.05; p = .016). Men in 2000 who worked reported lower levels of emotional support (b_m = −0.30; SE = 0.14; p = .036). This effect was absent in 2016 (interaction effect of historical time and work: b_m = 0.43; SE = 0.20; p = .032). Men's housework hours were related to higher levels of emotional support in men in 2000 (b_m = 0.01; SE = 0.01; p = .045). This effect was reversed in 2016 (interaction effect of historical time and housework hours: b_m = −0.02; SE = 0.01; p = .015). Finally, partner's satisfaction with housework was associated with more emotional support in men in 2000 (b_m = 0.04; SE = 0.02; p = .021). This effect was stronger in 2016 (interaction effect of historical time and partner's housework satisfaction: b_m = 0.05; SE = 0.03; p = .035).

Historical differences in practical support. Results of the multilevel model are shown in Table 5. Women indicated higher levels of practical support in 2016 (b_w = 0.34; SE = 0.08; p

< .001). There was no difference in men (b_m = −0.06; *SE* = 0.07; *p* = .404). In Model 2, a higher age was associated with lower levels of practical support in women (b_w = −0.10 per decade of age; *SE* = 0.04; *p* = .005). The effects of historical time and age are illustrated in Figure 2 (Panel B). In Model 3, men with a more educated partner reported higher levels of practical support (b_m = 0.04 per year; *SE* = 0.01; *p* = .007). Number of hours spent with housework was associated with less practical support in women (b_w = −0.01 per hour; *SE* < 0.01; *p* = .001). Satisfaction with the division of household work was associated with more practical support in both women (b_w = 0.29; *SE* = 0.02; *p* < .001) and men (b_m = 0.22; *SE* = 0.02; *p* < .001). The average absolute difference between partners' reports of practical support was lower in 2016 (2000: *M* = 1.85; *SD* = 1.96; 2016: *M* = 1.41; *SD* = 1.51; *F*[1,2140] = 33.14; *p* < .001), indicating a smaller gap (see Table 2).

Follow-up analyses indicated that the linear effect of age (b_m = −0.10; *SE* = 0.05; *p* = .070) on men's reports of practical support was moderated by historical time (interaction effect of historical time and age: b_m = 0.14; *SE* = 0.07; *p* = .048). That is, the linear effect of age was less negative in 2016. The quadratic effect of age (b_w = −0.13; *SE* = 0.03; *p* < .001) on women's reports of practical support was moderated by historical time (interaction effect of historical time and age: b_w = 0.10; *SE* = 0.05; *p* = .031). That is, the quadratic effect indicating more decline in practical support at high levels of age did not exist in 2016. In 2000, men's education was not related to women's reports of practical support (b_w = −0.01; *SE* = 0.02; *p* = .502). It had a positive effect in 2016 (interaction effect of historical time and education: b_w = 0.06; *SE* = 0.03; *p* = .045). Men's housework hours were related to higher levels of practical support in women in 2000 (b_w = 0.02; *SE* = 0.01; *p* = .034). This effect was weaker in 2016 (interaction effect of historical time and housework hours: b_w = −0.04; *SE* = 0.02; *p* = .012). Finally, satisfaction with housework was associated with more practical support in women in 2000 (b_w = 0.34; *SE* = 0.03; *p* < .001). This effect was weaker in 2016

(interaction effect of historical time and housework satisfaction: $b_w = -0.09$; $SE = 0.04$; $p = .025$).

BHPS

Propensity score matching. For 316 out of the 464 couples in 2008/2009, we were able to find a matching couple from the 1996/1997 wave with a caliper of $c = 0.10$ *SD*. Compared with matched couples in 2008/2009, the 148 non-matched couples had a shorter relationship duration (average of 4.5 vs. 6.0 years, respectively, $p = .009$) and were more likely to reside in Wales ($p < .001$), which is due to the oversampling of participants from Wales in the later waves of BHPS. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for socio-demographic characteristics. Descriptive statistics for relationship satisfaction and housework division are shown in Table 2.

Historical differences in relationship satisfaction. Results of the multilevel models are shown in Table 6. Men in 2008/2009 reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction ($b_m = 0.25$; $SE = 0.09$; $p = .006$). There was no difference in women ($b_w = 0.02$; $SE = 0.10$; $p = .872$). Age (Model 2) had no effect on relationship satisfaction for both genders. The effects of historical time and age on relationship satisfaction are illustrated in Figure 3. In Model 3, married women ($b_w = 0.23$; $SE = 0.11$; $p = .042$) and men ($b_m = 0.37$; $SE = 0.10$; $p < .001$) and women with more educated partners ($b_w = 0.05$; $SE = 0.02$; $p = .014$) reported higher relationship satisfaction. In couples where the woman was working, both women ($b_w = 0.30$; $SE = 0.13$; $p = .023$) and men ($b_m = 0.25$; $SE = 0.12$; $p = .034$) reported higher relationship satisfaction. In contrast, women whose partner worked reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction ($b_w = -0.54$; $SE = 0.17$; $p = .002$). More housework hours of men were associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction both in women ($b_w = -0.02$ per hour; $SE = 0.01$; $p = .023$) and men ($b_m = -0.02$ per hour; $SE = 0.01$; $p = .023$). The average absolute difference between partners' reports was similar across historical time (1996/1997: $M = 0.97$; $SD = 1.29$; 2008/2009: $M = 0.83$; $SD = 1.10$; $F[1,630] = 2.23$; $p = .136$; Table 2).

Follow-up analyses indicated that the effect of partner's education on women's relationship satisfaction was moderated by historical time. Partner's education was not related to relationship satisfaction in women in 1996/1997 (b_w = 0.01; SE = 0.03; p = .643), but in 2008/2009 (interaction effect of historical time and partner's education: b_w = 0.08; SE = 0.04; p = .045). Other effects were not moderated by historical time.

Discussion

In the present study, we examined whether historical differences exist in different indicators of relationship functioning in heterosexual couples over the recent decades. Our findings show that (a) conflict frequency increased for both genders from 1998 to 2011, (b) perceived availability of emotional and practical support increased in women from 2000 to 2016 and (c) relationship satisfaction increased from 1996/1997 to 2008/2009 in men. In addition, several individual, partner, and relationship characteristics were associated with relationship functioning. We discuss possible factors underlying these findings.

In the introduction, we outlined several factors contributing to historical differences in relationship functioning. According to the selection mechanism, socio-cultural changes may have reduced individuals' need to commit to and stay in less satisfying relationships. As a result, all relationship outcomes should be better in the later cohort. In sum, we found little support for predictions for historical change resulting from this mechanism, with conflict frequency increasing in both women and men, and emotional/practical support increasing only in women and relationship satisfaction increasing only in men. The selection mechanism is less likely to explain our findings regarding emotional and practical support, unless there were different selection mechanisms at play for women and men, which may have led women (but not men) in less supportive relationships to dissolve their relationship. Romantic relationships are an important context to experience relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and intimacy (McAdams & Constantian, 1983), and to give and receive social support (Fiori, Smith, & Antonucci, 2007). Thus, although the cost of leaving a relationship for well-being

may have declined across historical time, it may still be too costly in many instances. In addition, even in the earlier historical period in our study, average levels of conflict frequency were low and perceived support and relationship satisfaction were high. Thus, the experience of relationship was already very positive in this time period. Selection processes may be more important at lower levels of relationship functioning and less important at the population level.

According to the second mechanism, individuals' goals and expectations with regard to relationships changed over historical time. The suffocation model of relationships proposes that pursuing goals related to self-actualization in relationships lead to expectations that are too high and thus negatively affect the relationship. In contrast, Hadden and colleagues found that self-determined motivations in a relationship, such as valuing the relationship because it allows for self-improvement, were associated with being more supportive and with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Hadden, Rodriguez, Knee, & Porter, 2015). Increasing expectations from one's partner may increase potentials for conflict if these expectations cannot be met. Higher levels of conflict in women and men are in line with the predictions of the suffocation model. However, we did not find any evidence that other aspects of relationship functioning (emotional and practical support, relationship satisfaction) declined over time.

The third proposed mechanism underlying cohort differences in relationship functioning is related to increased egalitarianism. Rogers and Amato (2000) proposed that one of the reasons for increased conflict frequency over historical time may be related to increases in work-family conflicts. Our findings corroborated and extended this research that had focused on historical differences between the early 1980s and late 1990s. Thus, the increase in conflict frequency may be an ongoing trend. If work-family conflicts are driving increases in conflict frequency, employment, having children, and engagement in household tasks should be associated with higher levels of conflict. In line with this reasoning, women who worked and

women with children reported more conflict. After controlling for these variables, the historical increase in women's reports of conflict frequency was no longer reliably different from 0. Interestingly, the effects of employment and having children were only observed for women's self-report of conflict instead of for both genders. In sum, our findings supported the view that historical differences toward more relationship conflict may have resulted from increased work-family conflicts. With regard to the perceived availability of emotional and practical support, the observed pattern is also in line with what can be expected based on increasing egalitarianism over historical time. Specifically, we found that the gap between women and men's reports of emotional and practical support is closing both at the mean and at the within-couple level. This is in line with the expectation based on increasing egalitarianism. At the mean level, women's reports of emotional and practical support increased, while men's reports remained stable, leading to a narrowing or closing of the gap. The availability of dyadic data allowed us to examine historical differences in the within-couple gap (see Mustanski, Stark, & Newcomb, 2014). At the within-couple level, the absolute difference between partners' ratings was smaller in the later time period. Thus, the well-documented support gap may be closing over historical time. However, our finding that relationship satisfaction remained stable in women and increased in men, leading to a gender difference later in historical time, is not in line with the predictions based on increasing egalitarianism. **The Role of Individual, Partner, and Relationship Characteristics**

Age effects were largely in line with theoretical expectations and previous literature. In the COUPLES study, age was related to lower conflict frequency in women, indicating that middle-aged women reported lower conflict frequency than younger women. This finding may be explained by age differences toward higher levels of agreeableness (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008) in middle-aged compared to younger adults. Interestingly, this effect was not observed in men. In line with earlier research (Knoll & Schwarzer, 2002; Schwarzer & Gutierrez-Dona, 2008), women reported lower levels of support with age, while the same

effect was not found in men. Contrary to our expectations, age was unrelated to relationship satisfaction. Previous research has shown that relationship satisfaction starts high at the beginning of a relationship and declines over the course of time (Lavner & Bradbury, 2010). Although we examined effects of age and not relationship duration, both variables were very highly correlated in our study.

The interpretation that work-family conflict plays an important role in conflict was also supported by associations between conflict, employment, and having children. With regard to household tasks, our findings generally show that satisfaction with the division of household work is more consistently associated with relationship functioning than number of hours spent with housework. Furthermore, follow-up analyses indicated that the effects of men's involvement in household tasks for women's perceptions of available practical support has become weaker with historical time, suggesting that men's involvement in household tasks may no longer be seen as support provided to the partner. Also, our findings add to previous research by showing that in addition to individual satisfaction with household duties, partner's satisfaction also contributed to perceptions of emotional support.

With regard to mechanism of selection, being married was associated with higher relationship satisfaction in women and men. This is in line with previous research (e.g., Yucel, 2018; Silverstein & Giarrusso, 2010) and may relate to marriage typically representing a more committed relationship. Finally, having a more educated partner was associated with higher practical support in men indicating that partner's education may represent a resource in relationships.

Limitations and Outlook

To put our findings in perspective, we note several limitations of our study. First, we note limitations related to measures. Because each study involved different indicators of relationship functioning, associations across different measures could not be examined. It is an interesting question for future research whether the increased frequency of conflict is

associated with lower or higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, relationship functioning was measured with single items. However, previous research has shown that single items of (life) satisfaction can have good measurement properties (Kroh, 2006; Lucas & Donnellan, 2012; Schimmack, Schupp, & Wagner, 2008) and show substantial correlations with multi-item measures (see Hülür et al., 2016). Our measures of relationship functioning represent complex and multiply determined outcomes. Therefore, large effects of any single predictor are not to be expected (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, & Robins, 2013) and small effects can be meaningful at a societal level. For example, the effect of a 12-year historical difference on relationship satisfaction was similar in size with the difference between married and unmarried couples (Table 6).

Second, we note limitations due to the samples studied. Because of the availability of data, our study only focused on heterosexual couples. It is an open question how homosexual relationships have changed across generations as a result of recent historical changes, for example, toward more acceptance of these relationships. It is also important to note that there were some between-country differences in historical shifts: For example, there were historical differences in education and women's employment in COUPLES and SHP, but not in the BHPS.

Third, we note limitations regarding the timing of observations. The time intervals between the measurements were relatively small. The earlier and later measurement waves were only 12 (BHPS), 14 (COUPLES), and 16 (SHP) years apart. Due to the availability of data, the definition of historical time varied slightly across studies: The earlier assessment was between 1996 and 2000 and the later assessment between 2008 and 2016.

Summary

In sum, our findings on historical differences in relationship functioning based on three population-based samples in Europe show (a) increases in self-reported frequency of conflict for both genders, (b) increases in the perceived availability of emotional and practical

support in women, indicating that the gap between women and men is closing, and (c) an increase in relationship satisfaction for men, while no difference is found in women. This observed pattern is largely consistent with predictions based on increased egalitarianism. More research is needed to understand the associations between different indicators of relationship functioning and the specific mechanisms underlying historical change.

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Footnote

1. Alternatively, we took the average of both partners' report in case there was an inconsistency. This led to larger sample sizes, but did not affect any of the main findings of our study.

Table 1. *Socio-demographic characteristics by historical period.*

	COUPLES				SHP				BHPS			
	1998		2011		2000		2016		1996/1997		2008/2009	
	n = 174		*n* = 174		*n* = 1,071		*n* = 1,071		*n* = 316		*n* = 316	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Rel. duration (years)	6.02 $_{a}$ (1 – 32)	3.95	6.14 $_{a}$ (0 – 28)	3.87	19.68 $_{a}$ (0 – 57)	13.00	20.50 $_{a}$ (0 – 72)	13.54	5.15 $_{a}$ (0 – 54)	6.34	6.05 $_{a}$ (0 – 54)	7.55
Age (years)												
Women	27.35 $_{a}$ (21 – 49)	2.95	26.76 $_{a}$ (20 – 48)	2.93	43.81 $_{a}$ (19 – 82)	12.85	44.78 $_{a}$ (19 – 91)	12.89	32.20 $_{a}$ (18 – 81)	10.34	34.00 $_{a}$ (17 – 78)	13.74
Men	30.53 $_{a}$ (22 – 54)	4.13	30.03 $_{a}$ (21 – 58)	4.52	46.51 $_{a}$ (22 – 89)	13.20	47.59 $_{a}$ (19 – 94)	13.31	34.52 $_{a}$ (17 – 78)	10.80	36.48 $_{a}$ (18 – 87)	14.71
Education												
Women	3.25 $_{a}$	1.19	4.02 $_{b}$	1.47	12.63 $_{a}$	2.53	14.25 $_{b}$	3.15	5.45 $_{a}$	2.78	5.56 $_{a}$	2.78
Men	3.36 $_{a}$	1.28	3.99 $_{b}$	1.46	13.96 $_{a}$	2.91	15.08 $_{b}$	3.08	5.53 $_{a}$	2.72	5.37 $_{a}$	2.78
Employment												
Women	63% $_{a}$		78% $_{b}$		57% $_{a}$		72% $_{b}$		74% $_{a}$		68% $_{a}$	
Men	97% $_{a}$		98% $_{a}$		84% $_{a}$		84% $_{a}$		87% $_{a}$		83% $_{a}$	
Marital status												
Married	72% $_{a}$		56% $_{b}$		88% $_{a}$		80% $_{b}$		65% $_{a}$		43% $_{b}$	
Children in household												
≥1	52% $_{a}$		43% $_{a}$		62% $_{a}$		61% $_{a}$		47% $_{a}$		47% $_{a}$	

Note. Education is indicated on a scale ranging from 1 to 6 in the COUPLES, as the number of years in formal education in the SHP and by the CASMIN index (ranging from 1 to 9) in the BHPS. Different subscripts indicate historical differences in the respective variable within a study at $p <$ .05).

Table 2. *Historical differences in relationship functioning and in the organization of household tasks.*

		COUPLES				SHP				BHPS			
		1998		2011		2000		2016		1996-7		2008-9	
		n = 174		*n* = 174		*n* = 1,071		*n* = 1,071		*n* = 316		*n* = 316	
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Conflict frequency (0-6)	Women	2.07 $_{a}$	1.59	2.49 $_{b}$	1.60								
	Men	1.97 $_{a}$	1.51	2.29 $_{b}$	1.41								
	Difference	1.30 $_{a}$	1.25	1.23 $_{a}$	1.15								
Emotional support (0-10)	Women					8.46 $_{a}$	1.81	8.66 $_{b}$	1.65				
	Men					9.08 $_{a}$	1.22	9.11 $_{a}$	1.17				
	Difference					1.38 $_{a}$	1.49	1.13 $_{b}$	1.36				
Practical support (0-10)	Women					8.17 $_{a}$	2.15	8.51 $_{b}$	1.68				
	Men					8.58 $_{a}$	1.78	8.52 $_{a}$	1.53				
	Difference					1.85 $_{a}$	1.96	1.41 $_{b}$	1.51				
Relationship satisfaction (1-7)	Women									6.17 $_{a}$	1.26	6.19 $_{a}$	1.22
	Men									6.18 $_{a}$	1.28	6.42 $_{b}$	0.96
	Difference									0.97 $_{a}$	1.29	0.83 $_{a}$	1.10
Housework (hours/week)	Women					20.69 $_{a}$	12.15	15.37 $_{b}$	10.59	15.22 $_{a}$	11.91	12.97 $_{b}$	9.07
	Men					5.47 $_{a}$	5.49	5.91 $_{a}$	5.13	5.91 $_{a}$	5.57	5.78 $_{a}$	5.51
Housework satisfaction (0-10)	Women					7.98 $_{a}$	1.94	7.81 $_{b}$	2.01				
	Men					8.75 $_{a}$	1.47	8.68 $_{a}$	1.48				
Cooking/cleaning/washing (1-	Women	4.26 $_{a}$	0.64	3.85 $_{b}$	0.82								
	Men	2.00 $_{a}$	0.66	2.42 $_{b}$	0.69								
Taxes and paperwork (1-5)	Women	3.07 $_{a}$	1.59	3.07 $_{a}$	1.40								
	Men	3.25 $_{a}$	1.53	3.39 $_{a}$	1.35								
Repairs. car maintenance (1-5)	Women	1.79 $_{a}$	1.07	1.87 $_{a}$	1.10								
	Men	4.43 $_{a}$	0.95	4.34 $_{a}$	0.98								

Note. Different subscripts indicate historical differences in the respective variable within a study at $p < .05$. Difference = absolute difference between partners' reports.

Table 3. *Conflict frequency in the COUPLES: The role of historical time, age, and other correlates.*

	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		Men	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Fixed effects												
Intercept	2.07*	0.12	1.97*	0.11	2.07*	0.12	1.99*	0.11	2.10*	0.12	1.98*	0.11
Historical time	0.42*	0.17	0.32*	0.16	0.37*	0.17	0.30	0.15	0.32	0.18	0.34*	0.17
Age					−0.85*	0.31	−0.39	0.20	−0.99*	0.32	−0.38	0.21
Age^2					0.35	0.26	−0.07	0.16	0.27	0.26	−0.10	0.16
Marital status									−0.05	0.21	−0.24	0.20
Children									0.44*	0.22	0.18	0.20
Education women									−0.03	0.07	−0.03	0.07
Education men									0.03	0.07	0.13*	0.07
Employment women									0.46*	0.20	−0.13	0.18
Employment men									−1.16*	0.57	−0.66	0.53
Household work women									0.17	0.15	−0.03	0.14
Household work men									0.22	0.16	−0.21	0.15
Paperwork women									0.09	0.09	−0.08	0.08
Paperwork men									0.03	0.09	−0.13	0.08
Repairs women									0.07	0.08	0.10	0.08
Repairs men									0.08	0.10	0.11	0.09
Random effects												
Residual variance	2.52*	0.19	2.12*	0.16	2.48*	0.19	2.07*	0.16	2.33*	0.18	1.98*	0.15
Residual covariance	0.82*	0.13			0.78*	0.13			0.76*	0.12		

*$p < 0.05$. Historical time: 0 = 1998; 1 = 2011. Effects of age are reported per decade.

Table 4. *Emotional support in the SHP: The role of historical time, age and other correlates.*

	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		Men	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Fixed effects												
Intercept	8.46*	0.05	9.09*	0.04	8.39*	0.06	9.07*	0.04	8.47*	0.06	9.11*	0.04
Historical time	0.21*	0.07	0.02	0.05	0.22*	0.07	0.02	0.05	0.19*	0.07	0.04	0.05
Age					−0.13*	0.03	0.00	0.02	−0.14*	0.04	−0.04	0.02
Age^2					0.04	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02	−0.02	0.01
Marital status									0.10	0.11	−0.02	0.08
Children									−0.14	0.09	−0.19*	0.06
Education women									0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01
Education men									0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01
Employment women									0.19*	0.08	0.00	0.06
Employment men									−0.05	0.14	−0.06	0.10
Housework hours women									−0.01	<0.01	0.00	<0.01
Housework hours men									−0.01	0.01	0.00	<0.01
Housework satisfaction women									0.33*	0.02	0.07*	0.01
Housework satisfaction men									0.09*	0.02	0.23*	0.02
Random effects												
Residual variance	3.01*	0.09	1.43*	0.04	2.99*	0.09	1.43*	0.04	2.48*	0.08	1.25*	0.04
Residual covariance	0.56*	0.05			0.55*	0.05			0.35*	0.04		

*$p < 0.05$. Historical time: 0 = 2000; 1 = 2016. Effects of age are reported per decade.

Table 5. *Practical support in the SHP: The role of historical time, age, and other correlates.*

	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		Men	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Fixed effects												
Intercept	8.17*	0.06	8.58*	0.05	8.20*	0.07	8.58*	0.06	8.33*	0.07	8.63*	0.06
Historical time	0.34*	0.08	−0.06	0.07	0.35*	0.08	−0.06	0.07	0.27*	0.08	−0.12	0.08
Age					−0.10*	0.04	0.00	0.03	−0.11*	0.04	−0.02	0.04
Age^2					−0.02	0.02	0.00	0.02	−0.07*	0.02	−0.01	0.02
Marital status									0.01	0.13	0.07	0.11
Children									−0.02	0.11	−0.11	0.09
Education women									0.03	0.02	0.04*	0.01
Education men									0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01
Employment women									−0.01	0.10	−0.13	0.09
Employment men									−0.23	0.16	0.08	0.14
Housework hours women									−0.01*	<0.01	0.00	<0.01
Housework hours, men									0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01
Housework satisfaction women									0.29*	0.02	0.02	0.02
Housework satisfaction men									0.03	0.03	0.22*	0.02
Random effects												
Residual variance	3.73*	0.11	2.75*	0.08	3.71*	0.11	2.75*	0.08	3.30*	0.10	2.61*	0.08
Residual covariance	0.40*	0.07			0.40*	0.07			0.30*	0.06		

*$p < 0.05$. Historical time: 0 = 2000; 1 = 2016. Effects of age are reported per decade.

Table 6. *Satisfaction with spouse in the BHPS: The role of historical time, age, and other correlates*.

	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		Men	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Fixed effects												
Intercept	6.17*	0.07	6.18*	0.06	6.12*	0.08	6.16*	0.07	6.09*	0.08	6.11*	0.07
Historical time	0.02	0.10	0.25*	0.09	−0.01	0.10	0.24*	0.09	0.05	0.10	0.33*	0.09
Age					−0.06	0.06	−0.01	0.05	−0.12	0.07	−0.08	0.06
Age^2					0.04	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.02
Marital status									0.23*	0.11	0.37*	0.10
Children									−0.21	0.11	−0.14	0.10
Education women									−0.01	0.02	−0.02	0.02
Education men									0.05*	0.02	−0.02	0.02
Employment women									0.30*	0.13	0.25*	0.12
Employment men									−0.54*	0.17	−0.16	0.16
Housework hours women									0.00	0.01	0.00	<0.01
Housework hours men									−0.02*	0.01	−0.02*	0.01
Random effects												
Residual variance	1.53*	0.09	1.28*	0.07	1.52*	0.09	1.28*	0.07	1.44*	0.08	1.22*	0.07
Residual covariance	0.29*	0.06			0.29*	0.06			0.24*	0.05		

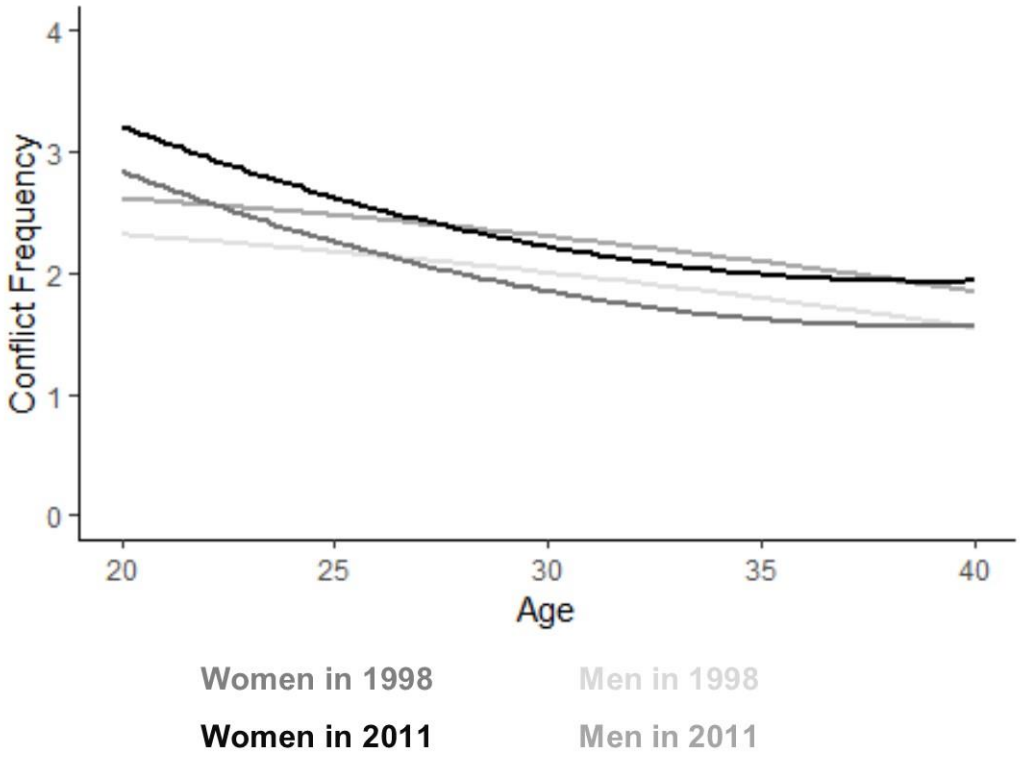
*$p < 0.05$. Historical time: 0 = 1996/1997; 1 = 2008/2009. Effects of age are reported per decade.

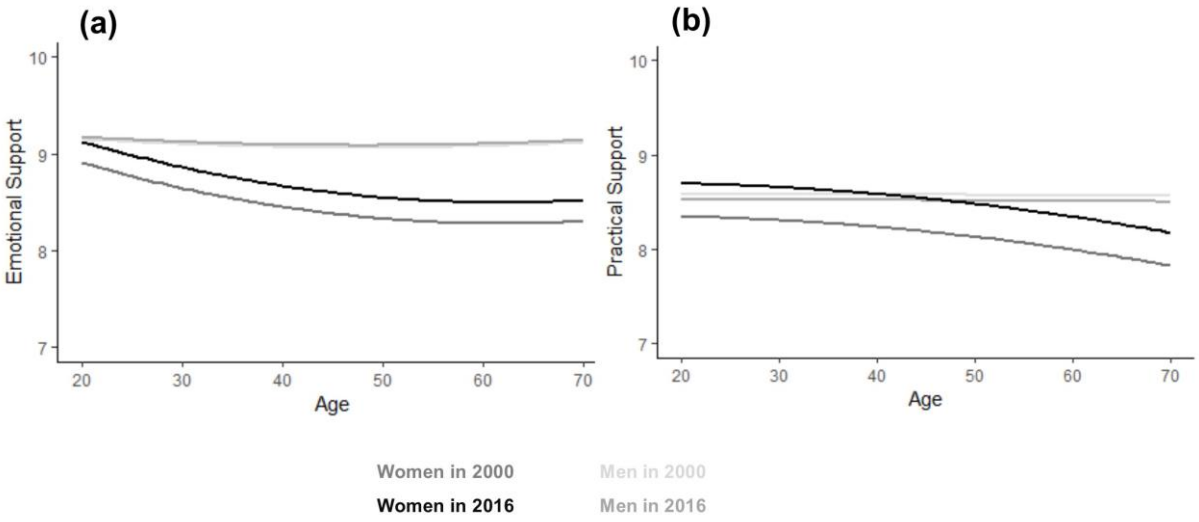
Figure Captions

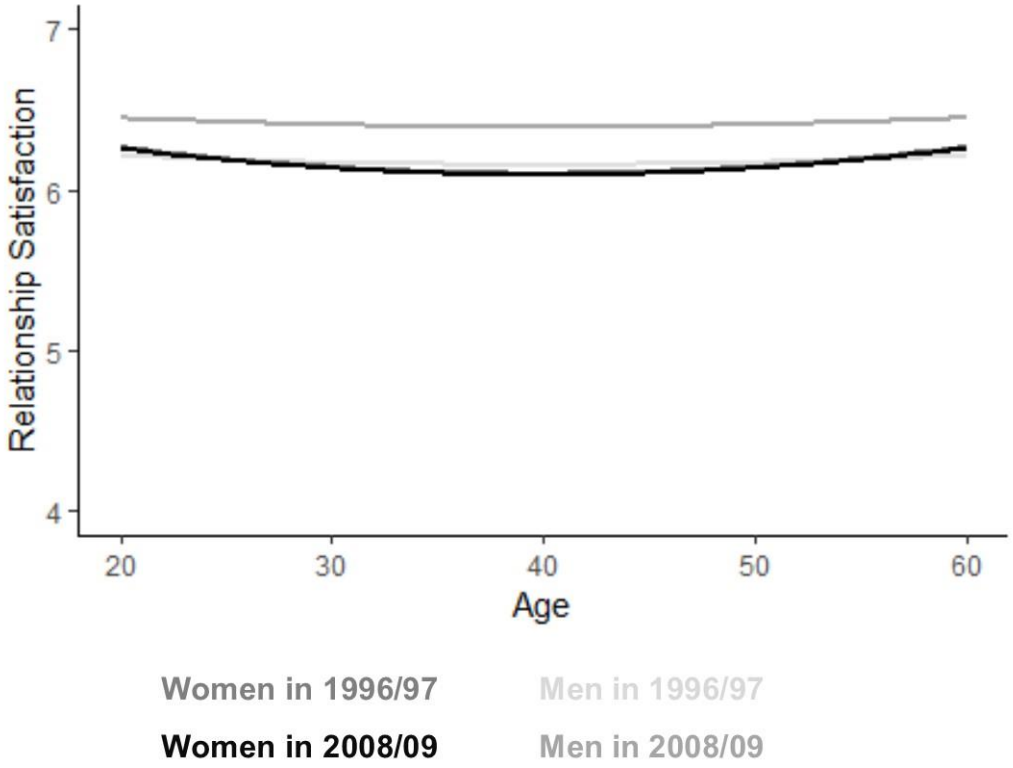
Figure 1. Illustrating historical differences in conflict frequency across age in the COUPLES study. Women and men in 2011 reported higher levels of conflict than women and men in 1998. In addition, women at higher ages reported lower levels of conflict.

Figure 2. Illustrating historical differences in available emotional (Panel A) and practical (Panel B) support from the partner across age in the Swiss Household Panel. Women in 2016 reported more emotional and practical support than women in 2000. In addition, women at higher ages reported lower levels of emotional and practical support.

Figure 3. Illustrating historical differences in available emotional support from the partner across age in the British Household Panel Survey. Men in 2008/2009 reported higher relationship satisfaction than men in 1996/1997. Age did not have a reliable effect on relationship satisfaction.


Conflict Frequency
0
1
2
3
4
20
25
30
35
40
Age
Women in 1998
Men in 1998
Women in 2011
Men in 2011


(a)
(b)
Emotional Support
Practical Support
10
9
8
7
20
30
40
50
60
70
Age
Women in 2000
Women in 2016
Men in 2000
Men in 2016


Relationship Satisfaction
7
6
5
4
20
30
40
50
60
Age
Women in 1996/97
Men in 1996/97
Women in 2008/09
Men in 2008/09